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United for Quality Care

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District 1199 New England
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee, my name is Althea Lovelace-Burnett and I am a nursing assistant and I assist nurses as they provide care to patients. I provide daily care - bathing, feeding, cleaning teeth, and care for patients that cannot do anything for themselves. Sometimes we help nurses taking out patient's IV line and if patients ask me to pray with them, I do. Sometimes they need someone to just talk to by encouraging them if they feel hopeless.

It is hard to work on call. It can be nerve wracking for me. I don't get to sleep because I am wondering if they are going to call. It gives me high blood pressure because of the lack of sleep. Another thing they will do is call you in and move the other person that is scheduled to work that day to another floor. It feels like I've already worked 3 shifts, I am tired because of short staffing and, then a 4th shift makes me feel burned out, fatigue and overwhelming pressure which can be unsafe.

The other problem is that we work short staffed. We need to hire more staff to work. In order to do that, the work that we do needs to be appreciated and respected, paid what it is worth, and communicated better with.

Short staffing hurts us because working short staff is physically, mentally, and emotionally draining on us - nursing assistants - on duty. It increases the risk of us getting sick or experiencing extreme fatigue after a long work week. This causes an even lower quality of patient care as there are simply not enough CNA on staff.

I have seen harm because of a shortage of staff. When patients fall out of bed, patients try to leave without being fully discharged, family members bring in drugs to a patient, patients attack co-workers where they get hurt. In fact, I was hurt on the job with my shoulder because we were short. Normally when the floor are fully staffed, we have enough help to reposition and turn patients, unfortunately, that day we were short nurses and two aides on the floor with 29 patients. That meant each CNA had 14 and 15 patients to care with no extra help. The nurse and I were boosting and turning the patient. They were heavy and we didn't have a lift in that room. So, the nurse was cleaning her while I was holding her by myself and she threw herself back, pulling me along with her because she was in pain. I ended up getting a tear in my trapezium and I was out of work for six months which also contributed to the short staffing levels. If we had enough staffing it wouldn't have happened.

Please fund Uconn Health Center so we can hire more staff. Thank you for your time.